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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Friday, November 19, 1937

(BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TURKEY FOR THANKSGIVING DAY". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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Today's broadcast is dedicated to the traditional Thanksgiving dinner--"turkey with trimmings". That basic menu hasn't changed much since those early Thanksgiving days in New England. If you serve turkey next Thursday, it'll be a descendant of the wild turkey that the Puritan homemaker served. And you'll probably fill it with savory stuffing, and make gravy from the giblets just as she did. Somewhere on your table also, there will probably be a dish of bright red cranberries, descendants of the wild berries that the early settlers gathered in the bogs of Massachusetts.

And the spirit of Thanksgiving day hasn't changed in all these years. It's still a time for feasting and giving thanks. And you have this added reason for thankfulness. Your reputation as a roaster of turkeys doesn't depend upon just any old bird that the man of the house happens to bag while he's out hunting.

You can do your own turkey-hunting--in the market--with your eyes and your wits. So there's no reason for you having the problem that must often have faced the cooks in early New England. You won't have to roast a venerable old gobbler that your husband hit with his blunderbuss while aiming at what he thought was a young turkey. You can choose your bird by age, and have it a hen or a tom. What's more, you can figure from the size of the company you'll be serving just how big a turkey to get.

When you go turkey-buying you'll find that most of them will have their feathers off but their head and feet on, and they will be undrawn. If you buy a turkey that weighs 15 pounds in this state, it'll make about 20 generous servings. So you can figure that if you have 10 people that will all want 2 servings of turkey, a 15-pounder will be just about right.

If you plan to have your turkey carved at the table, you'll want a bird that has a well-shaped breast bone. And you'll want one that has had its crop removed through a slit in the back or the side of the neck. Then when you stuff the neck it will stand up round and full.

Of course, the way your turkey tastes after you roast it depends a lot on its quality. If you are paying for a bird of good quality, you should get one that is well-fleshed. It should have no blemishes and few if any pinfeathers. And it'll have a good coating of fat under the skin. If this isn't there you can tell by the blue look that shows through over most of the skin surface. This fat is especially important in roasting. If it isn't there you'll have to add some in cooking.

Find out the age of the turkey, also. This will make a difference in the way you roast it. A young turkey has a flexible breast bone. An older turkey has a harder breast bone and is heavier for its size than a young one.

If you are buying ungraded turkeys, you'll have to judge these points for yourself or depend upon your dealer for answers to your questions. Tags will indicate the quality of Government-graded turkeys. And on these turkeys there will also be a statement of the age.

When you buy the turkey and have it drawn, see that whoever does this leaves a band of skin under the tail. This makes a convenient place to tuck the turkey's legs during roasting.

On Thanksgiving day, the bustle in the kitchen starts early in the morning. No sooner is breakfast over, than the cook gives thought to the turkey. For turkey-roasting is a long process and one that requires close attention. In our home it always got more attention than it really required--from children who came out to watch Mother stuff the turkey, and others who popped in at odd times during the morning.

After you've singed and cleaned the turkey, rub the inside of it with salt. Then pack the body and neck cavities lightly with stuffing. Tuck the legs beneath the strip of skin under the tail. Sew the opening, and fasten the neck skin back. Rub it all over with salt and butter. Pat it with flour.

Put it on a rack in a roasting pan without any water. Leave the lid off for a young turkey. For an older one keep a lid on part of the time.

The simplest method of roasting turkey is to put it in an oven, set the temperature somewhere between 300 and 350 degrees Fahrenheit and leave it there until your turkey is done. If you have a small turkey, use the higher temperature.

But if you have a large bird, use a lower temperature. For instance, a large turkey cooked at 300 degrees Fahrenheit would probably take about 18 to 20 minutes per pound for it to cook. That is for each pound of turkey as you bought it undrawn in the market allow 18 to 20 minutes.

Of course, if your turkey is smaller, you can use a higher temperature and it won't take so long to roast. To find when the turkey is done, test it with a skewer or a fork. Insert the fork in the thigh next to the breast. If the meat is tender and the juice doesn't look red, the turkey is done.

About every half hour baste the turkey with pan drippings. And when you baste it turn it from side to side and occasionally on its back. Keep the breast down most of the time so that this part won't get done too long before the dark meat.

I'll repeat some of the main turkey roasting points I have mentioned. A turkey weighing 15 pounds when you buy it undrawn will give about 20 generous servings. Roast a young turkey in an open roaster on a rack. Use a lid part of the time with an older turkey. Use no water in the roasting pan. The simplest method of cooking turkey is to keep it in a moderate oven at a constant temperature. This temperature may be between 300 and 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Baste and turn the turkey about every half hour.

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